A

DISSERTATION

ON

THE PROGRESS

OF

THE FINE ARTS.

BY

JOHN ROBERT SCOTT, D. D.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY T. BENSLEY, BOLT-COURT, FLEET-STREET;

AND SOLD BY J. WHITE, FLEET-STREET.

1800.

BRITISH MUSEUM

TO

BENJAMIN WEST, ESQ.

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY,

THE

FOLLOWING DISSERTATION

ON

THE PROGRESS OF THE FINE ARTS

IS DEDICATED,

WITH SINCERE RESPECT AND ALL DUE DEFERENCE,

BY HIS OBLIGED

AND FAITHFUL HUMBLE SERVANT,

JOHN ROBERT SCOTT.

22, GREAT ORMOND-STREET,
APRIL, 1800.

DISSERTATION

ON THE

PROGRESS OF THE FINE ARTS.

THE natural feelings of man, when he enters into ſociety with his fellow-creatures, firſt induce him to improve by the means thence acquired the arts neceſſary to his exiſtence and well-being: whoſe want he every day felt in his ſeparate and detached ſtate, and whoſe melioration he has juſt reaſon to hope from the union of combined force, and from the co-operation of confederated talents. Preſst inceſſantly by the demands for the ſuſtenance of animal life, to ſupply them plentifully is not only his firſt care, but alſo that of the community with which he has aſſociated, if it is even one degree removed from the ſavage ſtate: and hence, in this early period of growing civilization, the tending of flocks and the tilling of fields,

Paſturage and Agriculture, are deemed not only neceſſary but honourable occupations; the ſimplicity of untutored man ever leading him to eſtimate that to be moſt laudable which he finds to be moſt uſeful. Theſe being advanced to a certain degree of excellence, which, though far inferior to what they are obviouſly capable of attaining, is yet ſufficient not only for the comfortable but for the indulgent enjoyment of life, new deſires ariſe, new wants ſpring up; and their gratification is purſued with an eagerneſs correſpondent to the novelty of their origin, and the untried force of their impreſſion. The cravings of our animal nature being amply provided for by the ingenuity of the inhabitants, by the fertility of the ſoil, or by the conjoint operation of both, the imagination begins in the luxuriance of abundance to picture to itſelf new ſources of delight, and ſpurning, not without ſome contempt, the mere proviſion for exiſtence, to fancy ideal pleaſures, and to ſearch out with anxious care and laboured pains thoſe objects which may gratify them. And man, finding himſelf poſſeſſed of more than a ſufficiency to ſupply all his wants, is willingly inclined to impart ſome ſhare of that redundance to thoſe who will contribute to his convenience and ſatisfaction; to thoſe who will render his comforts at all times more comfortable, who will relieve the languors of his laſſitude, and fill up the

vacuities of his leiſure with amuſement. As there always were ſome to whom labour had no charms, other more agreeable means of acquiring ſupport were quickly ſought out, and the inventive powers of the mind were ſtretched to form thoſe imagined pleaſures whoſe want was felt, and whoſe reward was ready.

Hence Architecture, Painting, and Statuary, (with ſtrict propriety denominated the fine arts) primarily aroſe; hence they derived their moſt aſſiduous cultivation, and hence the utmoſt perfection to which they have yet attained. Unſatisfied with the hut that merely protected from the inclemencies of the elements, and, in the moments of repoſe, from the unwarned attacks of the ſavages of the foreſt, man ſoon ſought out for more permanent, more pleaſing habitations: to which experience firſt joined increaſed conveniencies, and then his inventive faculties, ſometimes aided by fortunate chance, ſometimes led on by correct fancy, added thoſe ornaments that have ſtood the teſt of ages, and fixed thoſe proportions that have uniformly approved themſelves to all the judicious through the revolving courſe of various centuries. The ingenuity of love taught the fair nymph to portray the ſhadow of that favoured youth whoſe merits had won her heart, that even in his abſence ſhe might feaſt her mind with beholding ſome

ſimilitude of his form: and hence the imagination, impregnated by the naſcent thought, conceived thoſe poſſibilities of excellence in painting, and that ſource of intellectual enjoyment thence ariſing, which Zeuxis and Parrhaſius exhibited to the admiring eyes of Greece, and which Raphael and Michael Angelo have diſplayed to the enraptured contemplation of the modern world. Poetry, it is true, early indeed enabled mankind, by the faſcinating power of its melodious ſounds and its perſuaſive numbers, to "raiſe monuments[a] more durable than braſs," and to conſecrate to immortality thoſe illuſtrious perſons who had entitled themſelves to laſting fame by their deſerts. But, even long antecedent to that period, the deſire of having ſome repreſentative form of reverenced or beloved individuals had taught men to make ſome likeneſſes of them in rude ſculptures of ſtone or ivory: though deſtitute of the advantage of colouring, yet more impreſſively ſtriking to the ſenſes than the productions of painting, had they then exiſted (which may be doubted), and, from the nature of their materials, leſs liable to the injuries of the weather. Theſe, we acknowledge, were cold, inanimate, and deſtitute of all appearance of motion; till Dædalus contrived to give expreſſion to the countenance and action to the limbs; on which ſuc-

[a] Exegi monumentum ære perennius. HORATII Carmi. Lib. iii. Ode 30.

ceeding artiſts improving, each rivalling and then ſurpaſſing his predeceſſor, at length produced thoſe "works to wonder at," the exquiſite, the unmatched, the divine dignity of the Apollo Belvedere, the energy, the athletic force of the Borgheſe combatant, the agonized expreſſion of the Laocoon, and the tearful ſorrows of the Niobe.

The expectations formed of the enjoyments to be derived from the maſterly productions of theſe Arts have in no one inſtance been diſappointed; but, we may aſſert without fear of contradiction, have in every caſe been greatly exceeded: for though the emanations of the arts, with the ſingle exception of the Apollo Belvedere, may have fallen ſhort of that ideal excellence which forms their ſtandard in each duly cultivated mind, as, in the department of literature, the great Roman orator ſtates to have been the caſe with his own admirable compoſitions, they have yet confeſſedly arrived at a degree of beauty, a ſplendor of effect, and a power of impreſſion, hardly to be hoped, and not eaſily to be conceived.

Should it then be demanded, what cauſes produced this tranſcendent beauty, this unrivalled grace, this combination of pleaſing form and perfect utility? They will be found, not in any fortuitous concurrence of accidents, not in any benign aſpect of the planets, not in any genial influence of the at-

moſphere, as has been weakly imagined and abſurdly aſſerted by certain ſelf-denominated Philoſophers of the continent; but to have been the effects of much labour and much pains, of much ſtudy and much induſtry, of great national encouragement, and of the peculiar ſituation of that fortunate land wherein they were advanced from their ſalient principle to their matured perfection.

To confine ourſelves to Greece, with which and its hiſtory, by means of its incomparable writers, we are beſt acquainted: the firſt ſtriking circumſtance in their favour was, that in it they were not borrowed, nor imported, nor cauſed by foreign imitation, but were the homebred produce of the country; and therefore, however cultivated and improved, always retained the rich racineſs of a native ſoil. Succeſſive generations of artiſts aroſe, each excelling the other in merit, and each of theſe had a correſpondent race of their countrymen ready to admire, and prepared to applaud them. No faſtidious delicacy, no affected ſuperiority of diſcernment or ſkill, repreſſed their talents, or curbed their genius: but free ſcope was given to the boldeſt of their flights, and, when they happened to ſucceed, the praiſe of their own age was their ſure and adequate reward. The productions of the earlier periods would not have, indeed, pleaſed in the poliſhed age of Pericles, unleſs as

illuſtrative of the progreſs of the arts; for then more captivating models were every day produced, more enchanting examples were every day exhibited to the view. But in their own age, and their own time, being ſuperior to all that had been ſeen before, they were thought matchleſs performances, and ſo received with undiſputed plaudits the higheſt eſtimation. This connate temper of the times (if I may uſe the expreſſion) proved a moſt powerful incentive to the abilities of the artiſts, and enſured to them, if ſurpaſſing in merit their predeceſſors, honourable regard, and that fame [b] which above all other conſiderations was dear to a Grecian heart. Hence labour and pains, aſſiduity and exertion, were unremittingly applied to advance their peculiar art, to ſmooth its aſperities, to ornament its nakedneſs, to improve whatever of excellent exiſted in it, and to aim at ſtill farther capabilities of excellence. Certain of the approbation of their contemporaries, repreſſed by no ideas of unattainable perfection, which were the growth of latter times and of the greateſt refinement, they daily added ſomething to the common ſtock; and though that ſomething was in itſelf, perhaps, inconſiderable, it yet raiſed its poſſeſſor to no common degree of celebrity. Thus the arts advanced, proceeding from ſtrength to ſtrength, conſtantly receiving ac-

[b] Præter laudem nullius avaris. HORATIUS De Arte Poetica.

ceſſions of improvement, which were favoured by many conſpiring, and retarded by no unpropitious circumſtances: and, being native to the country, the abilities of the artiſts in a great meaſure formed the taſte of the age, as its foſtering admiration conſtituted their moſt flattering reward.

From a ſituation perfectly diſſimilar, though the Romans long and ſedulouſly cultivated the arts, yet their nobleſt efforts never equalled the beſt works of the Grecian ſchool; of which the ſacred remnants ſtill remain unrivalled and unmatched. For amongſt them they were not indigenous, but introduced as it were by violence; by the power of the conquering ſword, and by the plundering of inſatiable rapacity: each of the Roman generals, however ignorant or unpoliſhed himſelf, yet pillaging vanquiſhed Greece of the choiceſt works of her happier days. Thus, indeed, exquiſite models and patterns of conſummate beauty were procured for the ruſtic Latians,[c] on which they wrought with aſſiduity, and attempted to emulate: but their redundancy was rather oppreſſive than co-operative, and their very perfection tended to prevent an encouraging eſteem of the riſing artiſts. For the judgment, or what we call the Taſte, of the public being formed not gradually, and

[c] - - - - - - - artes
Intulit agreſti Latio. HORATII Epiſ. Lib. ii. Ep. 1.

by progreſſive ſteps of improving art, but all at once, and (as it were) at a bound, aſſumed a ſqueamiſh delicacy which nothing imperfect could pleaſe, and which delighted more in finding faults than in diſcovering beauties. And this cauſe, whoſe operation is alike powerful and general, contributed more to keep down the Roman arts, and to prevent them from equalling the Greek, than any inferiority of talents, or than any want of continued application and culture.

The caſe has been the ſame in the modern world, and it will be found univerſally true, that where the arts have ariſen from natural, or nearly natural cauſes, and have thence proceeded by gradual advances to higher degrees of perfection, the judgment or taſte of the nation ſimilarly meliorating with their improvement, they have attained, and will attain, the utmoſt excellence which the abilities of the artiſts can give them: but when brought forward among a people by extraneous circumſtances, ſuch as the force of conqueſts, the commanding influence of ſupreme power, or the efforts of affected imitation, though they may bloom and flouriſh for a ſeaſon, that they never will arrive at that richneſs of maturity they have been ſeen to poſſeſs elſewhere, nor will enjoy that vigour of growth which native juices infuſe; but, like hot-houſe plants, though fairly ſeeming, are yet vapid to the ſenſe,

and when bereft of their borrowed heat, quickly ſink, rot, and die.

The progreſs of the arts in the ancient world, with the aſtoniſhing excellence to which they were carried, was alſo much aided by the manners and cuſtoms there prevailing, and in conſtant and daily practice. To games and vigorous exerciſes the ancients were remarkably addicted, regarding them both as liberal amuſements and as a preparatory diſcipline for the active occupations of war, in which each freeman of the ſtate knew himſelf obliged to engage at a certain period of his life, and which he could not avoid without being damned to never-ceaſing infamy. Now all theſe were performed *naked*, as well on account of the warmth of the atmoſphere as to preclude all unequal advantages, and to habituate the mind fearleſsly to expoſe the perſon to the aſſaults of incumbent danger. Hence the human figure was hourly exhibited to the inſpecting view of the attentive beholder, whether ſculptor or painter, in all its various forms of grace and elegance, of ſtrength and force, or of agony and torture: and theſe not the aſſumed appearances of fictitious feeling, but the vivid effects of actual endurance, and glowing from the mint of preſent impreſſion. Theſe were not to be ſought in Schools and Academies, they were not the lifeleſs colourings of mercenary

hirelings, but the energies of men emulous of fame, and conſcious that their characters with their countrymen would be materially influenced by their performances in theſe favourite conteſts. Conteſts which as amuſements were the delight of all, which as exerciſes were the duty of multitudes; which hoary age beheld with rapture, as recalling the remembrance of the days of their prime, and which unfledged youth gazed on with tranſport, as picturing thoſe deeds whereby they panted ſoon to be diſtinguiſhed. Thus nothing but the moſt careleſs inattention could avoid noting the diſtinctive marks of the various paſſions and affections, which nature writes in very legible characters: and as all from repeated obſervation were equally well acquainted with them, in their repreſentation by the artiſt nothing ſhort of the moſt exact and accurate likeneſs could hope for tolerance, much leſs for approbation.

Their ſcientific knowledge of anatomy, as applicable and ſubſervient to medical purpoſes, was perhaps inferior to ours, for they appear not to have enjoyed the advantage in their principal cities of ſuch men as the Hunters[d] and Cleghorn:[e] but

[d] Dr. William Hunter and Mr. John Hunter, the late celebrated anatomiſts of London.

[e] Dr. George Cleghorn, the late excellent and deſervedly famous Profeſſor of Anatomy in the univerſity of Dublin.

that inferiority proved not injurious to the artiſt, who chiefly engaged in imitating the prominent features of the human frame when thrown into action, amply compenſated for his ignorance of the theory of muſcular motion, of the nervous ſyſtem, and of oſteology, by the effects of obſervation inceſſantly repeated on the moſt ſtriking objects, and, it may be, the more impreſſive from coming unſought and uninculcated. In fact they could ſcarcely avoid making this obſervation: it was preſst on them from every quarter; it was urged on them by every incident. If they attended their morning exerciſes, it was excited there; if they reſorted to their evening amuſements, it was rouſed there alſo. In the retirement of the country it was not allowed to ſleep; in the buſtle of the city it was awakened to all its vivacity. From private enjoyment, from public ſecurity; from the recreations of peace, from the toils of war; from the vacuities of idleneſs, and from the labours of induſtry it alike received nurture, ſupport, and aliment. Thus reiteratedly enforced, its effects became, like thoſe of a ſecond nature, interwoven with the habitudes of the mind, and called forth into action, when the occaſion required, with readineſs and facility, without effort and without premeditation. Hence the wonders that we are told of the aſtoniſhing power of their paintings, limited as we know they

were in the number of their colours; of which though we are deprived of the ſight by the lapſe of time, yet are they rendered credible, nay, fully verified, to us by the matchleſs remains of their ſtatues; whoſe tranſcendent merit we have ocular demonſtration that neither prejudice had praiſed nor ignorance had extolled beyond their real deſerts. Hence the truth of nature in the Laocoon, where the expreſſion of ſuffering is not confined to the agitated viſage, but is as forcibly marked in the agonized foot as in the diſtorted countenance. Hence every muſcle moves, every ſinew is ſtretched, every atom of the figure conſpires to the general effect in the Borgheſe combatant:[f] and hence each particular part of the Farneſian Hercules repreſents, as forcibly as the entire ſtatue, that character of ſuperior manly ſtrength and reſiſtleſs might, which ancient tales have taught us to connect with the idea of the perſon of that fabled hero.

It cannot be inferred from what has been here ſaid that there is intended any unqualified approbation of the cuſtom of appearing naked; which ſo generally prevailed among the an-

[f] This ſtatue, which forms one of the moſt valuable poſſeſſions in the ſuperb Borgheſe collection, is commonly called *the fighting Gladiator*; but, we apprehend, very erroneouſly: as the whole of that admirable figure beſpeaks a character greatly ſuperior to that of thoſe degraded and deſpiſed beings, whoſe mercenary ſervices contributed to the amuſements of the Roman amphitheatre.

cients, and more eſpecially among the Greeks. Surely no: for its indecency is obvious; it ſmoothed the path to many immoralities, and doubtleſs tended in no ſlight degree to inflame, if not kindle, ſome notorious vices to which they were eminently addicted. But it has been merely conſidered with reſpect to its ſubſerviency to promote the arts of painting and ſculpture: and its powerful and ſalutary influence on them ſeems ſo apparent as to be nearly inconteſtible. It co-operated with other cauſes, yet to be mentioned, to give them that ſuperlative excellence which, through a long ſucceſſion of centuries, has excited uniform admiration; and which yet, ſuperlative as it was, fell ſhort of the ideas of it entertained and cheriſhed by the artiſts.

The peculiar ſituation of Greece, from the firſt beginnings of the arts to their moſt flouriſhing period, contributed alſo materially to their improvement and perfection. In its utmoſt extent not a country of large dimenſions, it was yet divided and ſubdivided into a number of independent ſtates; each eager for diſtinction, each emulous of fame, each jealous of all ſuperiority in their neighbours. Never for any length of time ſubject to the dominion of maſters, till the overwhelming influence of the Macedonian ſunk them all into common ſlavery, their conſtitutions were free, or what they regarded as

free: in which each citizen felt himſelf equally intereſted with any other to extend the reputation, to exalt the glory, and to enlarge the conſequence of the ſtate. And when the pre-eminence of power had aſſigned to Sparta, and afterwards to Athens, that preponderance of authority and weight of conſequence neceſſary to a leading ſtate, firſt among its equals; ſtill, from national ſpirit and from deep-rooted habits, an emulation every where prevailed of rivalling in the firſt rank of reputation each of their neighbours, although they had conceded to one of them the dignity of command. With the ſingle exception of Sparta, where the ſtern diſcipline of Lycurgus effectually prevented their progreſs, as after the arts had began to ariſe their cultivation was diffuſed and eagerly purſued throughout all Greece; the praiſe of excellence in them early became and long continued an object of the firſt importance with all its various ſtates. They regarded them not only as a means of internal ornament, in which yet they much prided themſelves, but alſo of external character; a means which might raiſe to higher fame than the moſt celebrated their favoured diſtrict, however inferior to them in political power. Hence the poſſeſſion of an artiſt of diſtinguiſhed abilities and ſuperior talents was conſidered as a national concern: and the eſteem wherein he was held, the

popularity he acquired, and the dignified ſtations to which with fair proſpects of ſucceſs he might aſpire, were anſwerable to the conſequence which his genius was thought to confer on his native land.

As this ſentiment was univerſal, animating the minds and guiding the conduct of all the different ſtates, its influence on the improvement of the arts, and on the exertions of their profeſſors, was powerful in the extreme. They were not deemed the lucrative trades of mechanical men, by which ſome fame and much money might be procured; but the ennobling occupations of the beſt-deſerving citizens, anxiouſly labouring to exalt the reputation of their country, and to raiſe her to a more envied eminence among the ſurrounding and rival republics. And the citizens thus employed were conſcious, in addition to the common motives of rivalry generally prevalent at all times among men of ſpirit engaged in the ſame purſuits, that not only their individual character, but the fame of their nation, was implicated in their labours; and fired by the warm energy of that recollection, they wrought with a glowing heat, with an ardour of enthuſiaſm that, in repeated inſtances, burſt forth in the brighteſt blaze of excellence. For their exertions in their particular arts were not thought, either by themſelves or by the public, the mere efforts of competition of ſculptors,

painters, or architects, with their fellow artiſts; but trials of merit between adjacent communities, each vain of their preſent character, each aiming at higher diſtinction, each hoping for the pre-eminence: to which trials the eminent artiſts ſtept forwards the champions of a people, not the combatants in a private conteſt.

Hence with unremitting zeal beauty and grace, ſtrength and ſpirit, truth and nature, were inveſtigated through all their different forms, were examined with minute attention, were applied with ſcrupulous accuracy. It little weighed with the profeſſor what his own countrymen, however poliſhed, judged of his work, what impreſſion it made on them, or what plaudits of theirs it called forth: but how it would be received at the Olympic or Iſthmian games, at the general aſſembly of all Greece; where each ſkilful eye and each intelligent mind would be employed in ſcrutinizing it without favour or affection, and would compare it as well with the beſt productions of ſimilar art then known as with the elaborate eſſays of contemporary artiſts. Thus whatever of genius, or talents, or ſkill, or judgment, or induſtry, each man poſſeſſed, was called forth into action by motives the moſt operative on the human mind, whoſe power is known and confeſſed: and the conſequence was the rapid and unequalled improve-

ment of the Arts. Improvement which ſtill aſtoniſhes, and which we are ſometimes inclined to imagine the effort of a ſuperior race of beings to thoſe with whom we converſe: but which aroſe from cauſes ſtrong and cogent indeed, but natural, and without difficulty diſcoverable.

Something not unlike this happened at the revival of the arts in Europe, and contributed materially to their advancement. For Italy, which was their cradle, was then broken into a number of independent ſtates, moſtly free, and rivalling each other in every praiſe of proweſs and policy. Hence, when the revival of the arts furniſhed a new ſource of fame, it was purſued with avidity; and the various ſchools formed in its different cities vied with each other for ſuperiority, and by their laudable rivalry promoted the progreſs of the arts with extraordinary celerity. And though, perhaps, theſe ſchools, which ſoon became diſtinguiſhed by peculiar merits, may not finally have contributed to the perfection of the arts, as leading their reſpective ſtudents rather to purſue the attainment of that one diſtinct merit than to aim at the acquiſition of univerſal excellence; yet, at the cloſe of the fifteenth and in the ſixteenth century, by their praiſeworthy emulation and vigorous exertions, they were ſingularly uſeful, and eſſentially tended to the rapid improvement of the reviving arts. Their fame added

much to the ſplendor and reputation of the cities wherein they were ſettled, and that circumſtance proved a very perceptible incentive to invigorate their talents and to animate their exertions; and ſo produced, though in an inferior degree, not a little of that ſpirited labour, of that enthuſiaſtic devotion to their profeſſion, which had aided ſo conſiderably the progreſs of the arts in Greece. We ſay *in an inferior degree*; becauſe the Italian cities, though ſenſible of their worth, and perſuaded of their public utility, never beſtowed on individual profeſſors ſuch extraordinary marks of attention and reverence as the Grecian ſtates were in the habit of laviſhing on their more illuſtrious artiſts; and, conſequently, the cauſe being leſſened, the effect muſt have been proportionably diminiſhed. In truth this ſpecies of rivalry, in which ſtates or nations, however ſmall, feel themſelves intereſted, has ever proved one of the ſtrongeſt ſtimulatives that could be applied to abilities; as it combines the patriotic affections of the worthy citizen with the natural ambition of the artiſt, and alike operates on ſome of the moſt powerful public and private ſprings of action.

But the labour and pains, the ſtudy and induſtry early employed, and long continued, in the cultivation of the arts, naturally and neceſſarily advanced their progreſs in a ſtriking

manner: raiſing them to ſuch a height of perfection as we weakly think unattainable, becauſe we will not uſe the adequate means of endeavouring to attain it. Labour is to man, from his conſtitution and his frame, the real price of every truly valuable acquiſition; which, though indolence ſpurns and idleneſs rejects, always brings its own reward with it, whether we are ultimately ſucceſsful or not, in the conſciouſneſs of having acted a manly part, and in the vigour of mind and health of body which it, and it alone, invariably confers. Some fortuitous inſtances may be mentioned of thoſe who have poſſeſſed both without its aid; of thoſe who, nurſed on the lap of indolence, and folded in the arms of idleneſs, have enjoyed that firſt of human bleſſings, a ſound mind in a ſound body: but they are inſtances to aſtoniſh, not examples to incite. This is even more ſtrictly and peculiarly true as it regards the arts, than it is in ſeveral other caſes. For the great merit of painting and ſculpture conſiſting in their exact and captivating copies of nature, and of architecture in its combination of beauty with grandeur, of convenience with magnificence, it is obvious that theſe qualities are never the caſual effects of chance and accident, of lucky hits and fortunate events; but the ſteady reſults of pains and care, of ſtudy and attention.

Of this truth the profeſſors of the arts in Greece were quickly and fully convinced; and applied that conviction to its only proper purpoſe, to an unremitting labour on their own appropriate purſuit: a labour which, paramount over each other object, neither pleaſure prevented, nor politics precluded, nor the calls of animal life hindered. To excel in their art, to ſurpaſs their predeceſſors, to outſtrip their competitors, to be the conſpicuous ſubject of Grecian admiration, were the objects of their daily thoughts and of their nightly dreams: objects which ſcarce for a moment retired from their view, or, if for a moment retiring, it was only that they might recur again with renovated force. The [g] *multa dies et multa litura* which the Roman poet aſcribes to the Grecian writers, and to which he truly attributes their ſuperior merit, were ſtill more eminently true of their artiſts; who applied to the completion of their various works a ſeverity of ſtudy and a perſeverance of labour that to us, habituated to very different manners indeed, ſeem ſurprizing; but of which the authenticated accounts cannot be diſputed. As exalted character, not the mere making of money, was the aim to which their thoughts were directed, it was purſued with that eagerneſs which honeſt ambition ever creates: and though, incidentally, fortune frequently followed

[g] HORATIUS.

their fame, as it came unſought for, none of its degrading motives ſwayed their conduct.

It was not the idea of the [h] hundred talents which he received, great as that ſum was (for not one *drachma* of it would he have received had not his work been approved), that inſpirited the genius of Phidias when he was ſculpturing the Olympian Jupiter; but the reflection that by his ſkill the rude block was to be transformed into the repreſentative likeneſs of the father of gods and men, to be the admiration and adoration of his enraptured countrymen: and hence profound ſtudy, exquiſite pains, and inceſſant labour, were employed to produce that ſtatue, which thence became afterwards the wonder of the world. Under the impulſe of ſuch impreſſions muſt the Apollo Belvedere have come from the hands of its unequalled ſculptor: for though we now not the hiſtory of that incomparable ſtatue, yet its expreſſion of dignity more than human, its unforced graceful eaſe which nature can but faintly copy, its perfect ſymmetry, and union of complete beauty with full bodily ſtrength, tell more than a thouſand witneſſes the pains, the ſtudy, and the labour that muſt have been unremittingly exerted to produce it.

It would argue a ſilly prejudice, not a due ſenſe of the merits of the ancients, to attempt to inſinuate that this labour

[h] 19,375 l.

and ſtudy, to which we are inclined to attribute ſo much, was univerſal. No; for in Greece then, as with ourſelves now, there were among the artiſts (what in the modern phraſe we call) *fine gentlemen:* perſons of too ſublime a genius to condeſcend to ſtudy, and of too delicate a frame to ſubmit to labour. The character of the ſpecies has been preſerved, though the names of its individuals have long, long ſince been forgotten. But they never promoted the progreſs, never advanced the improvement of any art: but, like their *amiable* ſucceſſors, followed a trade for ſupport, and did not cultivate a profeſſion with dignity. But the perſons of whom we ſpeak, as diſtinguiſhed by theſe qualities, were thoſe worthy citizens who addicted themſelves to no art without adorning and improving it; whoſe names ennobled the age in which they lived; who then were never mentioned without reverence, nor yet, at this far diſtant period, are ever thought on without reſpect. By their ſtudies and their labours, vigorouſly and undeviatingly exerted, was the progreſs of the arts promoted, their improvement accelerated, and their near approximation to perfection effected: they thus experimentally proving the energetic power of theſe valuable qualities, and leaving examples to fire the emulation of the ſpirited and the active in each future age.

In addition to the circumſtances already mentioned, whoſe power and efficiency on the progreſs of the arts we have endeavoured to point out, there muſt be called to mind the great national encouragement which they received in Greece, and the extraordinary influence which it muſt have had on the warm imaginations of its gay and high-ſpirited inhabitants. The deſire of diſtinction and honour is a principle interwoven in the conſtitution of our nature; and though, like moſt others we poſſeſs, it is liable to perverſion, is in itſelf not only blameleſs but laudable; inciting the beſt exertions of talents where they are, and often ſupplying their place where it finds them not. There are no countries, however adverſe the regent of the day may have yoked his horſes from them, where its operation is not more or leſs felt: and in exact proportion to the civilization and mental improvement of each country, its aſcendency has ever been found to be high, its dominion to be great. This is ſtrictly true even with regard to the eſtimation of private individuals: but the applauſe of a whole people has invariably been deemed the moſt juſt meed of the moſt exceeding merit, ever ſince nations have aſſumed a fixed and ſtable form. Now this applauſe formed an important part of the great national rewards by which Greece foſtered the arts; and it was a part that peculiarly came home both to the buſi-

neſs and boſoms of each worthy citizen, and cauſed every pulſe of a Grecian heart to vibrate to its impreſſion. Their characteriſtic fondneſs of fame is known and acknowledged; but this applauſe, though by them in itſelf extravagantly valued, was not a mere empty, flattering ſound: for, from the conſtitutions prevailing in nearly every ſtate of Greece, it was the ſure conductor to domeſtic dignity, to political power, and to commanding ſway in the public deliberations. The firſt offices of the ſtate, and the prime truſts of the government, were open to that diſtinguiſhed artiſt whoſe admired performances had ſecured the univerſal ſuffrage. They were often without ſeeking offered by popular gratitude to his acceptance; nay, ſometimes with honeſt violence forced on his unwilling reception. Thus the principles of intereſt, ambition, popularity, confeſſedly ſome of the moſt powerful that guide the conduct of mankind, were called forth in aid of that natural bent or diſpoſition which had induced the man to cultivate any particular art: and the conſequence was ſuch as might be expected from the efficiency of ſuch operative motives, ſurpaſſing merit and ſupreme excellence.

Another ſpecies of national encouragement, nearly connected with this, was the certainty which the eminent artiſt enjoyed that, whenever the occaſion offered, his talents would

be employed to erect, or to decorate with the labours of his pencil or his chiſſel, the temples, the theatres, the porticoes, the places of public aſſembling of the cities of Greece; where his works, contributing amply to his fortune from their munificent reward, would contribute more to his fame when expoſed to the ſcrutinizing view of that intelligent people. He had no cauſe to fear that his abilities would be overlooked or buried in obſcurity by prepoſſeſſion, partiality, or prejudice: he had no apprehenſions to dread from the effects of intereſted relationſhip, of commanding influence, of narrow local attachment, or of proud and preſuming ignorance. If his merit was acknowledged his employment was ſure; and he was even courted by the general voice to exert his talents for the public credit, not depreſſed in their exertion by mean and baſe affections. He was not obliged to ſolicit for employment with humiliating applications, and, when employed, to labour under the multiplied diſadvantages of deficient or ſtinted means, of complying with vitiated judgments, of ſubmitting to the ſenſeleſs whims of folly and caprice. Full ſcope was given to the fertility of his imagination, to the extent of his genius, to the vigour of his fancy: whilſt all the powers of his mind and all the vigour of his body, all the ingenuity of his head and all the dexterity of his hands, were impelled to their beſt per-

formances by the conſciouſneſs that all deficiencies would be imputable ſolely to himſelf, the public being free from the ſlighteſt ſuſpicion of having either curbed or confined his abilities. As no elevation of genius made him giddy, hence grace and beauty, ſtrength and vigour, expreſſion and paſſion, reſpectively marked his performances; and his fame became connected with the edifices, the ſtatues, the paintings, that ornamented the country, which ſtruck every eye, and which none beheld without recollecting with reſpect the able artiſt whoſe workmanſhip had produced them.

The effect of this kind of encouragement on the arts was great, is manifeſt, and need be but ſlightly mentioned: yet, perhaps, may appear the more ſtriking from contraſting it with ſome practices of more modern times. In them the firſt city in the world has diſgraced itſelf with all who have eyeſight, by employing to erect its moſt expenſive building an architect *becauſe the man was a citizen:* and, in more countries of Europe than one, ſtatues and paintings are exhibited as commemorative of illuſtrious public deeds, where contorſion and extravagance, where flutter and glare, form the predominant characters; but they diſhonour thoſe countries, on account of the artiſts engaged to execute them being employed becauſe they were the favourites of deſpots, the flat-

terers of titled harlots, or the relations of directors; whilſt men of the firſt talents and merit in their profeſſion were pining in indigence and obſcurity, unnoticed and unfriended. The conſequences of this latter conduct none will ſay that we have reaſon to boaſt of from the ſuperlative excellence of modern art; but what has been felt from it may readily induce us to believe how eſſentially its direct oppoſite muſt have promoted the progreſs of the arts in Greece.

The vaſt ſums expended by the Grecian ſtates on their public monuments and their public works (vaſt, indeed, when the comparative value of money then and now is conſidered), tended much to aſſiſt the progreſs of the arts, and to aid their high improvement. For, though we have unqueſtionable reaſon to believe that the ſordid motive of private profit was not the firſt principle in the minds of thoſe great artiſts who have immortalized their names by their works, yet without a certain liberality of expence their ideas could not have been realized, their works could not have been executed; and that liberality they found limited commonly by nothing but the public means, and often not even by them. We know from the graveſt and cleareſt authorities with what laviſh expenditure ſcenic repreſentations were exhibited at Athens, with what unbounded magnificence her temples, her tribunals, her por-

ticoes, were decorated: we equally well know the ſplendor of Corinth, a near neighbouring city; the incalculable price of its paintings, the ineſtimable value of its ſtatues, and that from the coaleſced maſs of its molten metals there aroſe, at its deſtruction, a compound more highly prized by the Romans than gold. The other principal cities were alike ſtudious of embelliſhment, alike emulous of ornament, and in various proportions enjoyed them according to the circumſtances of time and ſituation: but Delphi and Olympia, the grand ſeats of the national religion and the national games, concentered in themſelves each choiceſt production of genius, each happieſt effort of art, each tranſcendent diſplay of excellence; amaſſed with a judgment that delighted, with a profuſion that ſurprized, and with an expence that aſtoniſhed.

This generous ſpirit in carrying on and completing public works which, though it may ſometimes be puſhed to an exceſs (as, perhaps, was the caſe in Greece), is ſo truly honourable to any people, had, and obviouſly muſt have had, the moſt decided influence in advancing and improving the arts, and in giving them that degree of perfection which has never yet been exceeded, nor even equalled. It excited exertion, by the ſecurity that its efforts would not be ſuffered to remain undiſplayed, but would be invited to add lovelineſs to the

beautiful, and ſplendor to the magnificent; it rouſed the full force of emulation, by the certainty that ſuperior merit would receive ſuperior rewards, and neither be permitted to languiſh in privacy nor to pine in poverty; and it invigorated the boldeſt flights of genius, by the firm aſſurance that there was a prevalent ſpirit ready to countenance, prepared to adopt, and anxious to encourage them. It would be no ſmall abſurdity to affirm that fortune, as well as fame, had not attractions for a Grecian artiſt; for it muſt ever be abſurd to affirm generally the abſence of the operation of general principles: and therefore the great pecuniary recompences which their talents procured had, doubtleſs, a proportionate influence on all their labours to improve their art; though, it may be, leſs in that region than in many other countries. And from the combined efficacy of theſe ſeveral kinds of national encouragement, which, like different branches of the ſame tree, ſpring all from the ſame root, the progreſs of the arts was furthered ſo eſſentially, was advanced ſo highly, as we have heard of with wonder, and have ſeen with amazement.

So complex having been the cauſes, ſo ſlow and progreſſively gradual the progreſs of the Fine Arts, highly grateful muſt it be to every truly Britiſh breaſt to conſider the rapid advances they have made in this favoured Iſle within the laſt

fifty years: advances certainly unmatched in their former hiſtory; as in that period they have ariſen from the utmoſt imbecillity of infantine weakneſs (indeed almoſt from *non-entity)* to a vigorous maturity that leaves far behind them the emaſculate efforts and puny productions of all other contemporary European nations. The cauſes of this unequalled improvement have notoriouſly been the countenance and foſtering protection of his preſent Majeſty, an admirer and intelligent judge of their merit, and the ardent ſpirit of emulation excited among the artiſts themſelves by ſuch exalted and diſtinguiſhing notice. Theſe co-operating have produced an exertion of talents, a diſplay of abilities, and emanations of genius that always were in exiſtence, but which required concurring circumſtances to bring them into full action, and to cauſe them to expand their latent energies. And had the general patronage been correſpondent to theſe fortunate incidents, had not the faſhionable jargon of preſumptuous, ſelf-created, arbiters of taſte, affecting to deſpiſe National art, vitiated the public mind, or rather ſtrengthened an ancient prejudice there floating, it is not eaſy to conceive how much greater ſtill would have been their progreſs. It is at leaſt certain that our ingenious young artiſts would have been amply encouraged to exert themſelves, and not ſuffered, after the moſt promiſing exhibitions of dawn-

ing talents, to pine in indigence and wretchedneſs, to ſink into obſcurity and oblivion, or (like the ill-fated, but moſt meritorious Proctor [i]) to haſten, in the very opening of life, the termination of mortal exiſtence from the excruciating preſſure of continued penury and miſery.

[i] The fate of this ingenious youth deſerves to be diſtinctly recorded. Born of humble parentage in one of the more diſtant counties, he had early manifeſted an admiration of the Arts, and, being admitted a ſtudent of the Royal Academy, eminently diſtinguiſhed himſelf there by his abilities and his induſtry. Applying peculiarly to Sculpture, ſoon after the termination of his ſtudies in the Academy he exhibited, at its annual Exhibition in Somerſet-place, two models of unrivalled excellence, which might, without fear of deterioration, have been placed in competition with the happieſt productions of the beſt days of Grecian art, and which at the time met with their well-earned applauſe. But, alas! applauſe was his only reward: no wealthy patron took him by the hand, no affluent lover of the Arts enquired into, or aſſiſted, his circumſtances; and his means being very confined, miſery was his portion. He had however the ſoul of an Artiſt, and for a length of time bore up with manly fortitude againſt his diſtreſſes. The preſent worthy Preſident of the Royal Academy, ſuſpecting his ſituation, with the aid of the Council obtained for him from the Academy an annuity of 100l. a year, to enable him to go to Italy, and improve himſelf there: but the unhappy youth had unavoidably contracted ſome trifling debts, which he was utterly unable to diſcharge, and his mind was too delicately alive to every finer feeling to bear the thought of leaving this country without paying them. This circumſtance, preying on his agitated ſpirits, and on a frame emaciated by the ſevereſt diſtreſs, cauſed his ſpeedy diſſolution, to the irreparable injury of the Arts. After his death it was diſcovered that, for the laſt two years of his life, he had reſided in a miſerable cock-loft in the worſt houſe in Clare-market, which he had rented for a ſhilling a week; and that his daily ſuſtenance for that time had been *only two dry biſcuits with a draft of water from the market pump.*

Thus having attempted to inveſtigate the progreſs of the arts, and to what was owing that ſupreme excellence which they formerly attained, we ſeem to have reaſonable grounds to conclude that it flowed from ſuch natural and moral cauſes as, at all times and in all caſes, are known powerfully to affect the feelings and to actuate the conduct of man. No whimſical refinements, no marvellous myſteries, no imaginary and fantaſtic theories have been had recourſe to: but lighted on our way by the irradiating torch of authentic hiſtory, and unſeduced by the falſe glare of lying legends, we have not dared ſo much to affirm what, in certain ſituations, our fellow-creatures MUST do, as to detail with ſome care what in fact they DID do. If what we have here advanced has not the attraction of novelty to allure, it is hoped that it is not deficient in the recommendation of truth to convince. It has not been thought neceſſary formally to refute the ſentiments of thoſe profound Philoſophers, who have ſagaciouſly diſcovered the cauſes of the inferiority of the arts in ſome countries and of their ſuperiority in others, and conſequently the perfection to which they arrived in Greece, in the power of the ſolar beams in certain latitudes, in the influences of the atmoſphere, and in thoſe of terreſtrial and celeſtial vapours: for if the cauſes here aſſigned appear fully adequate to the end produced, as we conceive

they do, it muſt be idle to ſhew the inutility of others, gratuitouſly brought forth from the inexhauſtible ſtorehouſe of fancy, and ſupported by any thing rather than ſolid reaſoning. It muſt be allowed that they very roundly aſſert, but as fallaciouſly argue, whenever they deign to argue on this ſubject: for mere aſſertions, poſitive, pompous, preſuming, but aſſertions ſtill, are the commoneſt weapons of their warfare. And, poſſibly, it would neither be reputable to conteſt the ſpecious ſubtilty of the ſophiſms of even ſuch ſages, nor honourable to conquer the powerleſs imbecillity of their aſſertions.

It is but fair to avow that this enquiry into the progreſs of the arts has not been entered on for the ſole purpoſe of aſcertaining, as far as we were able, the cauſes of the ſurpaſſing excellence to which they were carried in Greece, without at the ſame time intimating, with due deference to ſuperior judgments and to ſuperior authority, the efficacy of the ſame cauſes, at all times and in all countries, in improving and exalting them. As human nature is the ſame at all periods, though diverſified in its exterior ſhew by the various cuſtoms, modes, and manners, that variouſly prevail, it cannot be ſeriouſly doubted but that thoſe principles, which have been found by experience in one country to powerfully ſway its conduct, and to incite its efforts in the Arts to their nobleſt

productions, would be equally efficient and equally ſucceſsful elſewhere, were they fairly applied, and as vigorouſly exerted. We have no ſatisfactory reaſon for believing that either the mental or corporeal powers of man have degenerated in the ſucceſſion of ages: and we well know that, by the benefits of experience and invention, conſiderable aids have been added to both, to methodize their motions and to facilitate their operations. Our profounder and better-ſtudied knowledge of Metaphyſics, our improved ſkill in Natural Philoſophy and Mechanics, and our more accurate acquaintance with the principles of colours, with their combinations and their ſhades, all confeſſedly tend to theſe points. Should then the ſame liberal public encouragement be diſplayed, by thoſe poſſeſſed of the power of diſplaying it, as dignified the beſt days of Greece; ſhould the ſame labour, the ſame pains, the ſame ſtudy, the ſame induſtry, be uſed by modern artiſts as diſtinguiſhed their truly illuſtrious predeceſſors; we might not vainly hope to ſee the arts carried to ſtill greater perfection than they have ever yet attained; we might expect to behold their deficiencies ſupplied, their utilities increaſed, their energies enlarged, and their beauties augmented.

On national encouragement it becomes not the mediocrity of our talents and ſtation to preſume to decide; yet, poſſibly,

it will not be judged too vauntingly confident to ſay that it ſhould in all caſes be ſpirited, generous, impartial, and ſhould not be ſubjected to the caprices of power, to the varying humours of the tranſient depoſitaries of the public confidence, nor to the inconſtant and ever-mutable guſts of popular phrenzy. What effect ſuch encouragement would have on the artiſts themſelves can, indeed, be only conjectured; for ſuch encouragement has never yet been exhibited in the modern world: but that conjecture is neither vague nor random, as it is guided by permanent principles, and directed by the known influence of ſteady affections on the human heart. It may be affirmed then, with ſome aſſurance, that it would inſpirit their labours, that it would multiply their pains, that it would invigorate their ſtudies, that it would augment their induſtry: for ſuch were heretofore its experienced conſequences in ſimilar caſes, and therefore they are reaſonably to be expected again. They would not waſte their youth in the riot of lawleſs pleaſure, and ſo treaſure up ſickneſs and ſorrow for the days of their prime: they would not ſpend their hours in the ceaſeleſs purſuit of the intoxicating amuſements of ſome great capital: they would not lay out their whole attention on the low and ſubordinate, but gainful, branches of their *trade*, in contempt of the ſuperior features of their ART, and of its poſſible im-

provement: but concentring all their powers, all their abilities, all their faculties, in the advancement of their peculiar purſuit, would rapidly raiſe themſelves from the drudgery of mechanical workmanſhip to the proud elevation of profeſſional exertion. Thus the arts, advanced by ſo conſpicuous a change of manners in their cultivators, and by an encouragement differing ſo widely from the paltry private patronage pretending to that name, would attain that ſtate of perfection to which their admirers fondly wiſh to ſee them carried; but which they muſt wiſh in vain till ſomething like the changes here etched out ſhall have taken place. And that what depends on the artiſts has not been too ſanguinely ſuppoſed, nor too ſtrongly pictured, will ſurely not be aſſerted: for it has only been ſuppoſed that they are men of common ſenſe and natural feelings; that they are not inſenſible to the allurements of each dignified diſtinction in life; that they have hearts that can be warmed and minds that can be roufed.

That much higher ideas might juſtly be formed of ſome artiſts we can poſitively affirm from perſonal knowledge; as we know ſome who have really the ſouls of Artiſts; who, even in preſent circumſtances, inſtead of grovelling all their lives in mean and ſordid occupations, adventurouſly dare to ſoar into the immenſe void of poſſible excellence; and whoſe characters

it would be highly grateful to portray, were not the defire reſtrained by the conſciouſneſs of inability to do juſtice to their merits. Such men, indeed, by the vigour of their genius, counteract the diſadvantages to which they may be expoſed, and, burſting the barriers of oppoſing obſtacles with ſpirit all their own, impart to the arts whatever of addition or improvement they receive; elucidating their obſcurities, poliſhing their aſperities, and lopping their luxuriancies: and their number might be increaſed to any given amount. But until that halcyon period ſhall arrive, if it ever ſhall arrive, when the arts ſhall be conſidered as real national objects, and receive *real* national encouragement (without which, it muſt be confeſſed, all extraordinary progreſs in them is not *generally* to be expected), their beauty, their grace, their grandeur, depend on theſe men alone. And conſcious of the high ground whereon they ſtand, as the champions of truth and nature againſt faſhion and futility, and caprice and extravagance, and of the poſſible benefits reſulting from their labours in giving paſſion to the mute canvas, expreſſion to the inanimate block, and magnificence to utility in each public edifice; they will not ſuffer themſelves to be diſcouraged by temporary neglect, nor to be diſheartened by temporary preferences of the incapable and undeſerving. They will ſtrengthen their minds to encounter the

provoking criticiſms of pert and petulant preſumption; they will ſcorn the contempts of ſelf-conceited and ignorant folly, however highly ſeated; and they will meet with firm dignity the misjudging deciſions of purſe-proud affluence. And conſcious worth ſhall crown them with a wreath of honour, greener than ever bloomed on the brow of an Olympic conqueror; their own hearts ſhall applaud them; their works ſhall form a laſting monument to the immortality of their names; and their fame ſhall float down the current of future ages with daily increaſing ſtrength, with daily augmented ſplendor.

The final reſult then of our enquiry on this amuſing and intereſting ſubject is, that we have the beſt grounds for concluding the progreſs of the arts originally, and the great perfection to which they were carried in Greece, to have ariſen from natural and moral cauſes of confeſſed efficacy, and not from any caſual circumſtances, extraneous to and independent of man: and we deem it reaſonable to think that the ſame cauſes, operating as uncontroledly any where elſe within the extent of the temperate climates, would moſt probably again produce the ſame effects. Far from indulging any licence of imagination, or from giving wing to its flights, it has been endeavoured rather carefully to detail facts than wantonly to invent ſyſtems. Of the evidence, which to us has appeared

convincing, the public will judge: of the rectitude of our intention in producing it we are ſure, for it is only to incite public reward, to encourage ſtudy, and labour, and induſtry.

THE END.

BRITISH MUSEUM 12 AP 86

T. Bensley, Printer, Bolt-court, Fleet-street, London.